

STATE OF MISSOURI SITE VISIT
Mental Health Transformation State Incentive Grant
May 20 to 22, 2008

Introduction

From May 20-22, 2008, Marian Scheinholtz, the CMHS Government Project Officer (GPO); Neal Brown, CMHS Director of Community Support Programs and the MHT-SIG Project; and Alan G. Kaufman, the Advisor/Consultant (A/C) for Missouri, conducted a Mental Health Transformation State Incentive Grant (MHT SIG) site visit to Missouri. The following is a brief overview of the structure of the Missouri MHT-SIG, the major activities and areas reviewed during the site visit, and both observed strengths and challenges/recommendations.

Brief Overview of Missouri MHT-SIG Structure

Missouri's approach to transformation of its mental health system focuses on infrastructure development/refinement at the state agency level and building working partnerships at both the state and local levels among all involved and interested providers, governmental agencies, and stakeholders.

At the state level, a Governor-appointed Transformation Working Group (TWG) including senior leadership of state agencies plus consumer and family representatives is actively involved in providing continuous input, direction, and oversight to MHT-SIG activities. Utilizing the NFC Report as its foundation, the first 18 months of grant activities focused on a bipartisan, cross-agency, public-private partnership inclusive of stakeholders at all levels to develop a "Needs Assessment & Resource Inventory for Mental Health" and the state's first "Comprehensive Plan for Mental Health" (CPMH). This detailed and expansive Plan now serves as the state's overall blueprint for current and future transformation efforts.

Although the MHT-SIG cooperative agreement focuses on transformation of the mental health system, the State of Missouri has chosen to expand its focus so as to include its residents with substance abuse or addictive disorders and those with mental retardation/developmental disabilities. Missouri is unique among other MHT-SIG grantees in this regard and intends to fully integrate the services, resources, and needs of all three target populations within its transformation initiative.

Site Visit Purpose:

The purpose of the site visit was to obtain an improved understanding of the TWG structure and process; an increased knowledge and understanding of activities proposed in the CPMH; and to assess the perception of consumers/families, state agency leadership, and others as to the progress of transformation efforts and collaboration issues among partners. Additionally, the visit was intended to demonstrate partnership between the state and SAMHSA/CMHS and to identify areas in which CMHS activities and/or resources might be of further assistance to the state.

During the visit, the site review team met with and/or participated in meetings with the following key leaders and their staff:

- *Keith Schafer*, Director of the Missouri Department of Mental Health
- *Diane McFarland*, Chair of the Transformation Work Group (TWG) and Project Director for the MHT-SIG initiative
- *Benton Goon*, Co-Chair of the TWG and Assistant Director of the MHT-SIG Initiative
- *Trish Vincent*, Chief of Staff to the Governor
- *Bill Anderson*, Governor's Policy Liaison and Governor's Designee to the TWG
- TWG member agencies and stakeholder representatives at the May TWG meeting
- Consumer and family members actively involved in MHT-SIG activities and planning
- *Carol Evans* and MHT-SIG Evaluation Team staff of the Missouri Institute of Mental Health
- *Robert Freund*, Chief Executive Officer, St. Louis Regional Health Commission
- *Bethany Johnson*, Chief of Staff, St. Louis Regional Health Commission
- *Joe Yancey*, Chairperson, Behavioral Health Advisory Board to the Eastern Region Behavioral Health Initiative, St. Louis Regional Health Commission

Major Activities of Site Visit

In addition to several meetings with state officials and informal discussions with other persons involved in or affected by the state's transformation initiative, the site visit team participated in the following major activities:

Tuesday, May 20, 2008:

Although a large part of May 20th was a travel day for members of the site visit team, an evening dinner meeting was held with the Director of the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH) and both the Project Director and Assistant Project Director of the MHT-SIG initiative. The Missouri DMH is comprised of three divisions encompassing the three population groups included in the transformation process: the Division of Comprehensive Psychiatric Services; the Division of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities; and the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse. The Director underscored the strong commitment of the entire Department to the goals of the MHT-SIG and emphasized that the recently completed CPMH now represents the state's roadmap for transformational change for all three Divisions and the population groups they serve.

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

Convened at the Governor's office, the site visit team met with Trish Vincent, Chief of Staff to the Governor and Bill Anderson, a policy liaison to the Governor and his designee to the TWG. Ms. Vincent assured the team of the Governor's strong support for the initiative and his appreciation to SAMHSA for its award of the cooperative agreement to Missouri. She also indicated that she had personally represented the Governor at the "kickoff event" recently held to announce the CPMH to emphasize the importance of the effort and that all of the cabinet members were both enthusiastic and supportive of the initiative. Although the Governor is not seeking another term of office in this November's election, Ms. Vincent assured the team that the MHT-SIG project would be included in transition planning with the new administration and that it was fully expected the project would continue to receive support at the highest levels.

Following the meeting at the Governor's office, the team travelled to the DMH offices for a meeting with the Transformation Working Group. Although several state agency TWG members were unable to attend (due to vacation schedules following the very recently concluded legislative session), many members were in attendance including consumer and family representatives. The site visit team was introduced and time was devoted to an active discussion between the team and the TWG regarding various aspects of the project. Additionally, topic focused discussion was held at the meeting regarding:

- Review of the Implementation Kick-off meeting where the CPMH was introduced to the public
- Transformation Related Budget and Legislative Summary from the just completed Legislative session (2008) – many Key FY2009 items were funded, but notably several school based and other children's mental health/social services programs were not fully funded.
- Review of membership of TWG Chartered Workgroups (Mental Health Promotion and Public Education; Mental Health & Aging; Evidence-based Mental Health Practices; Housing; Employment). Consumer/Family representatives were added to the Housing Workgroup during the meeting (they were already represented on all the other workgroups).
- Report on Children's Services Working Group – Trauma Initiative, Family Support, and Bright Futures.
- Report on Missouri Show Me Series – Mental Health First Aid, Respect Seminars and Initiatives and Procovery.
- Discussion of the Mental Health Foundation recently established in the state.

At the conclusion of the TWG meeting, and without the attendance of state project staff, the site visit team met with approximately 10 consumer and family members involved in the transformation initiative. The purpose was to gain their perspective on the overall progress of the effort, the extent and quality of their personal involvement and that of other consumer and family representatives, and to identify areas, if any, in which consumer participation might be improved. The discussion was both open and candid.

All representatives were very clear in their support of, and appreciation for, the approach being taken by the state, its demonstrated commitment to achieving a consumer and family driven mental health system, and the considerable progress made during the first 18 months of the grant. Additionally, the high level of expertise, knowledge, commitment, and support of project leadership and other staff was repeatedly commended by all present.

At the same time -- and while acknowledging substantial improvements made to date – concerns were raised in several areas. These included a desire for increased communication with Office of Transformation leadership staff; desire for consideration of a statewide consumer/family summit to possibly develop more cohesiveness among consumer and family groups and programs; need for greater focus on employment for consumers; and clarification that state endorsement, support, and/or promotion of any one consumer run/led program is not intended to exclude other models and that a full menu of such programs is both appropriate and desirable.

Following the meeting with consumer and family representatives, the site visit team met with project leadership and staff from the Missouri Institute of Mental Health contractually responsible for the state's evaluation component of the initiative. Discussion centered on the status of evaluation activities to date, the planned identification and entering of GPRA measures onto the tracker system, and issues related to the Proof of Concept studies required by CMHS. Although the state's progress in project evaluation activities is timely and appropriate, concern was raised regarding the requirement for two Proof of Concept (POC) studies and the costs associated with them. In this regard, the state requested additional information on the flexibility, if any, that might be considered in the POC design and/or the number of studies that might be conducted. It was agreed that clarification of requirements would be discussed in an upcoming conference call with CMHS' contracted evaluation staff and that this concern would be further considered by CMHS.

Thursday, May 22, 2008

After travelling from Jefferson City to St. Louis the evening before, the site visit team met with the Behavioral Health Advisory Board to the Behavioral Health Steering Committee of the St. Louis Regional Health Commission.

The St. Louis Regional Health Commission (RHC) is comprised of representatives of healthcare providers, advocates and community members from St. Louis City and County. The RHC was formed in 2002 and its Eastern Region Behavioral Health Initiative began in 2006. This initiative "...seeks to ensure that the behavioral health services in the region provide care that is streamlined, easily accessible and focused on the client". The Behavioral Health Advisory Board is composed of providers, consumers and advocates representing mental health, substance abuse, and mental retardation/developmental disabilities. Its role is to provide recommendations and feedback to the behavioral health initiative, help shape its direction, and serve as an advocate for the initiative in the community.

At the meeting attended by the site visit team, approximately 30 people were present including providers, consumers, family representatives, and advocates, as well as the leadership of the Office of Transformation. The group reviewed and commented on three action plans recently developed by separate task forces/teams of the Behavioral Health Initiative: Improving Entry Task Force; Coordinating Care for High Utilizers Implementation Team; and the Reducing Stigma Implementation Team. Each action plan included practical strategies to address the identified areas and represented the participation of multiple stakeholders in their development. Of particular note, and to assure the active involvement and feedback of Advisory Board members themselves, the attendees were sub-divided during the meeting into smaller groups so that each action plan could be more fully discussed, considered, and refined.

Following its participation with the Behavioral Health Advisory Board, the site visit team attended a luncheon meeting with the Chief Executive Officer and Chief of Staff of the St. Louis Regional Health Commission. The CEO emphasized the importance of its behavioral health initiative and strong recognition by the Commission of the need for improved integration of health and behavioral health care in the provision of services to the residents of the eastern region. In this regard, the goals and activities of the Commission and the MHT-SIG project are identical and both cooperation and partnership between these efforts is evident.

Strengths of the System:

The State of Missouri has notable strengths that promise to serve it well in its efforts to transform its mental health system. They include, but clearly are not limited to:

- Strong and committed leadership from the Governor, his Chief of Staff and Policy Liaison, the Director of the Department of Mental Health, and the leadership of the Office of Transformation. It is evident that the transformation initiative represents a concerted effort at the highest levels of state government and notable that the recently completed Comprehensive Plan for Mental Health has been adopted for all persons with mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, and/or mental retardation/developmental disabilities.
- Also evident is the active leadership, support, and involvement of senior officials representing State agencies and other stakeholder groups appointed by the Governor to the Transformation Working Group (TWG). The wide-ranging issues discussed at the TWG meeting as well as the active and knowledgeable participation of its members demonstrates both a full understanding of complex issues associated with Transformation and their commitment to increasing organizational responsiveness to the needs of mental health consumers and families.
- The State of Missouri is actively implementing a number of innovative programs to further its transformation process and to underscore its intent to reduce discrimination, improve access to services and supports, and achieve a consumer and family-driven mental health system. Although far from exhaustive, among these programs include Procovery, Peer Specialist training, Mental Health First Aid, Respect Seminars, the Show Me series, and the Mental Health Foundation.
- The St. Louis Regional Health Commission's Behavioral Health Initiative is an excellent example of local implementation of transformational principles and a model of state/local collaboration that other regions and states would do well to emulate. Its involvement of stakeholders at all levels and its commitment to not only improve behavioral health services but to fully integrate them with primary health care is a practical and effective approach that is particularly noteworthy.

Challenges and Recommendations:

A Transformation process like that initiated by SAMHSA/CMHS and their state partners has many formidable challenges associated with it. The State of Missouri shares many of the same challenges as other states, but also has some unique aspects due to its geography, population, and other factors. It is clear that these challenges are recognized by the state and its partners, and that strategies to address them are being discussed and incorporated within TWG policy formulations, work groups, and other activities.

Although the State has made substantial progress in its MHT-SIG activities to date, several areas merit highlighting at this stage of the transformation process:

- As noted above, the commitment of the Governor, his immediate staff, and the cabinet as a whole is strong and noteworthy. Unquestionably, this active support has been instrumental in allowing the state to have made considerable progress during the first 18 months of the MHT-SIG initiative. In recognizing the change in gubernatorial leadership which will occur in Missouri in January 2009, it is reassuring that the expressed intent of the current administration is to include continuation of the transformation project in its transition planning. Nonetheless, maintaining the direction and momentum of this important initiative will be a formidable challenge and one that will directly impact project goals and timelines.
- As a result of discussions conducted during the site visit, it is clear that the input and perspectives of adult consumers, families, advocates, and other key stakeholders are highly valued by state officials. Consumers and families have been appointed to the TWG and its separate Workgroups, and talented consumers are engaged in transformation leadership and advisory positions. Although the desire and commitment of state officials is both recognized and acknowledged by consumer and family leaders, the views expressed in a meeting with the site visit team were in agreement that improved communication with state officials, increased opportunities for input and feedback, and increased understanding of transformational planning would be beneficial.

In this regard, it is recommended that project staff -- together with consumer and family leaders – consider designing a process that will strengthen and maintain ongoing communication. The range and scope of transformational activities is immense and assuring constant communication among all parties is a massive challenge. Utilizing regularly scheduled meetings between staff and consumer/family leadership and/or other approaches will be important in accurately informing all parties of actions being considered or implemented, and in reducing the rumors and misinformation that typically accompany large system change.

- As previously noted, the State is actively implementing a number of innovative programs to further its transformation process. Although its intent in most cases is to augment other programs and services currently provided in the state, lack of clarification in that regard has resulted in fears that support of already existing programs will be lessened. In such instances, it is recommended that the state be very explicit when promoting new approaches so that unfounded concerns are minimized.

Conclusion:

The primary goals and objectives of the site visit were achieved. The site visit team had the opportunity to personally meet with the Governor's Chief of Staff and his Policy Liaison to the transformation initiative, the Director of the Department of Mental Health, and project leadership, as well as attend the TWG meeting. Additionally, the team met with consumer and family leaders, project evaluation staff, and leadership of the St. Louis Regional Health Commission and its Behavioral Health Advisory Board. In doing so, the visit allowed the opportunity to assess both the progress made to date and those major steps required in the immediate future. From this review, it is clear that the State of Missouri is meeting its obligations under the CMHS MHT-SIG Cooperative Agreement and that the transformation process is well in progress.

At the same time, it is also clear that substantial challenges lay ahead in the State as gubernatorial leadership changes occur in the months ahead and as the Comprehensive Plan for Mental Health is being implemented. The TWG partnership structure, the shared vision of member agencies and stakeholders, the commitment of Missouri state leadership, and the continued and expanded involvement of advocates, consumers, youth, and families already provide an operational foundation for achieving the goals of transformation and the improved mental health and substance abuse services that will result.